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U.S. spy agencies recruit in New England's ivory towers

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The Central Intelligence Agency will be on New England campuses this fall looking for men and women to serve their country — with cloak and dagger.

So will the top-secret National Security Agency, which has been described as the government's "ears" abroad. The National Security Agency gathers intelligence from foreign broadcasts and also is responsible for making sure all U.S. government communications are secure.

Both have representatives permanently stationed in Boston. National Security Agency recruitment chief Bernard Norvell said the agency opened its Boston office in 1980 because of the number of colleges in New England.

"They've been a very good source for recruitment in the past," Norvell said.

At the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, CIA recruiters usually have been booked solid when they visited the campus during the past four years.

"There's always a waiting list" for CIA interviews, said Arthur Hilson, director of the University Placement Service.

IN RECENT YEARS, the presence of intelligence recruiters on campus has caused controversy at some colleges. But with the job market tight, there are always students who are interested.

"If 20 or 30 students are concerned (with the CIA being here), you've got several thousand others who are concerned about getting a job," said Hilson.

"If you don't want to be employed by the CIA, you don't have to go over and be interviewed," said Ray Boyer, a spokesman for Williams College.

CIA recruiters say they don't want "James Bond" types, but college graduates with backgrounds in computer and physical sciences,

economics, engineering, languages or foreign studies. They are also looking for mathematicians and photo interpreters.

The National Security Agency is seeking graduates in electronic engineering, computer science, math and Slavic, Middle Eastern and Asian languages.

Applicants for the jobs must be U.S. citizens and have at least an undergraduate degree.

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THE CIA OFFERS new employees a starting salary of \$15,000 to \$16,000. More experienced experts in some fields start at \$25,000. National Security Agency salaries fall into the same range.

Robert Weatherall, director of career planning and placement at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, noted that those starting salaries are not as high as some in private industry.

Both the CIA and National Security Agency recruit every year at MIT. "Students aren't scrambling to see them, but there are undoubtedly students who want to talk to them," Weatherall said.

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HOWEVER, the acceptance of intelligence recruiters isn't universal. At Clark University in Worcester, a spokeswoman said the CIA hasn't been on campus since the late 1960s because of the controversy at that time.

The National Security Agency visited Harvard University for the first time last year, according to John Pollack, associate director of placement. The CIA did not recruit at Harvard last year.

However, CIA recruiters did make several visits to meet students at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Medford.

"It's a pretty common occurrence here in the fall," said Pat Savignano, of the school's placement office.

How many Massachusetts students actually are hired by the spy agencies isn't known. At the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Marjorie Fernald, coordinator of career planning, estimated that one student a year might have been hired by the National Security Agency.

Fernald said she hadn't seen any increase in intelligence recruiting in the past few years.

However, a CIA official said that in addition to the agency's regular campus recruiting, it has started seeking candidates for intelligence jobs through radio and newspaper advertisements.

"These are the times to put your training and ability to work where it really counts," says a radio commercial for the CIA prepared by a New York advertising agency. "The qualifications are high but so are the rewards to come," the ad says.

SO FAR, the radio commercial has not run in Massachusetts, but similar newspaper ads have run in Boston and other cities.

They are part of a CIA recruitment drive designed to beef up the agency's staff, fulfilling a Reagan campaign pledge.

CIA budget and personnel figures are classified. However, Director William Casey has been quoted as saying the CIA has more money this year, after several years in which its budget had lagged by comparison with inflation.

Charles Jackson, chief of recruitment for the CIA, said the advertising campaign has produced a lot of resumes but wouldn't say how many — that's classified. He said, however, that campus recruitment is successful.